

First 5 San Diego

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A Healthy Diet Can Help Protect Your Child from Lead Poisoning

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A healthy diet offers children many benefits. Nutritious foods support continued growth as well as physical and brain development. Eating nourishing foods also helps the body protect itself against lead poisoning. Children under six are most vulnerable to lead poisoning because their brains and nervous systems are still developing. Young children's bodies absorb lead more easily than adults do and are more at risk for lead poisoning. Whether spending time inside on the floor or outside on the ground, children tend to put their hands or other objects, possibly contaminated with lead dust, into their mouths. Small amounts of lead can build up in the body and cause lifelong learning and behavior problems. Lead-poisoned children usually have no obvious physical symptoms and do not appear to be sick.

One great way to help prevent lead from being absorbed into your child's body is to provide healthy meals and nutritious snacks, four to six times a day. A full stomach aids the body in taking in less lead. **Each day, give your child three to four foods high in calcium, iron and vitamin C.**

Since the foods a child should eat change as your child grows and develops, be sure to talk to your healthcare provider about the types of foods your child should be eating for his or her age.

- **Calcium** reduces lead absorption and also helps make teeth and bones strong. Good sources of dietary calcium include: milk or milk alternatives such as soy milk, cheese, yogurt, tofu, salmon, broccoli and other dark green vegetables, and cereals.
- **Iron** helps protect the body from the harmful effects of lead. Examples of foods where iron is found are lean meat, chicken, fish, cooked beans, baked potatoes, raisins, oatmeal, spinach, and iron-fortified cereals.
- **Vitamin C** increases iron absorption and helps to reduce lead absorption. Some good sources of vitamin C are limes, oranges, tomatoes, mangos, melons, bell peppers, strawberries, kiwi, and papaya.



Also, limit items high in sugar and fat such as desserts, soda, chips, bacon, sausage, and fried foods. Avoid candy or snacks from other countries, especially those containing chili or tamarind. Following these dietary tips can help keep your children safe from lead poisoning.

No amount of lead in a child's body is safe.

A blood test is the only way to know for sure if your child is lead poisoned.

For more information, contact the Childhood Lead Poisoning Prevention Program at 619-692- 8487 or see www.sdlead.org